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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
9 November 1963

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Soviet Motivations and Objectives in Autobahn Harassments

1. We believe that Soviet leaders do not regard sporadic and controlled harassment of Allied autobahn convoys as being incompatible with the prevailing "detente" atmosphere in East-West relations. Their concept of detente does not imply a period of consistent relaxation of tensions in which both sides forego attempts to upset the status quo everywhere. In Khrushchev's view, a period of relaxation does not require the complete abandonment of efforts to advance major objectives, but merely a shift in tactics away from the sharp pressures that characterized Soviet policy in 1961 (a deadline for a German peace treaty) and 1962 (the Cuban missile venture).

2. The Russians look upon these incidents as a useful and timely reminder to the West that the failure of the Cuban venture, Soviet economic exigencies, and the pressures of the dispute with China have not diminished the USSR's ability to confront the West with a serious challenge over Berlin at any time. Khrushchev is extremely sensitive to any indication that the West is trying to capitalize on his domestic and intrabloc problems. The Soviets have been careful to maintain close control over the incidents in order to minimize damage to other foreign policy aims, such as further agreements with the West on matters of secondary importance. Khrushchev, however, undoubtedly feels the need from time to time to serve notice to both the West and his own allies that the Soviet Union remains a strong, confident world power and that it is under no compulsion to reach agreements at any price.

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3. Another important feature of Moscow's current outlook is the belief that the US Government is sufficiently committed to a policy of relaxing tensions to allow considerable room for maneuvers of this kind. The Russians have always calculated that detente tactics would tend to inhibit strong Western responses to Soviet initiatives and increase the difficulties within the Western alliance of devising unified responses to Kremlin maneuvers.

4. We believe there was some possibility that the incidents last month could have been prompted by factors other than foreign policy calculations, such as disagreements within the Soviet hierarchy. We find no evidence, however, that considerations of this nature had any significant bearing on Soviet behavior in November; the latest incidents bear all the earmarks of careful preparation and coordination between Moscow and Soviet military authorities in East Germany.

5. In the context of current Soviet tactics, pressures on Allied access to Berlin are essentially a form of political leverage in pursuing a revised strategy with respect to the Berlin and German questions. Khrushchev seems to expect a protracted period of stalemate with regard to his original demands for a German peace treaty and a Berlin settlement. He is acutely aware that the failure of his Cuban operation last year not only weakened the USSR's relative power position but raised the Western price for a Berlin agreement.

6. While the Russians thus see no early prospects for winning Western concessions to their major demands regarding Berlin, they hope that a detente atmosphere will provide opportunities to move toward these goals by indirect, piecemeal means. Their present course of action, in our view, is directed toward gradually altering the status of West Berlin by a series of modest, seemingly unimportant steps.



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Immediate Soviet Objectives

7. By deliberately creating confusion and impasse on the issue of procedures for processing Allied convoys, the Russians are seeking to underscore the urgency of negotiations at the political level to remove this source of a potentially dangerous confrontation. We believe they would try to use talks on access as an entering wedge for moving on to broader questions such as the status of West Berlin, German frontiers, and "respect" for East German sovereignty.

8. Moscow's decision to exert pressure on the sensitive point of Berlin access probably reflects a judgment, based on talks with American and British leaders, over the past three months, that the Allies are interpreting the post-test ban treaty "detente" atmosphere to mean that the Berlin question has lost all urgency and that the USSR has no choice but to accept the status quo indefinitely.

9. Although we cannot determine the precise origins of the autobahn incident on 10 October, there is no question that the Moscow leadership quickly recognized the opportunity to "step on our corns." The detention of the US convoy on 4 November clearly was the result of a high-level Soviet decision to challenge the Allied "harmonized procedures" for processing convoys. Soviet checkpoint authorities obviously were fully prepared to stage a test over the first nondismountable convoy to appear after the Allies had conveyed their procedures to the Soviets on 29 October.

10. Khrushchev's remarks to visiting American businessmen on 6 November suggest that he intends to stage further incidents in the belief that the Allies eventually will agree to talks on the immediate issue of access modalities. He probably was encouraged in this view by the assurances conveyed last month by Ambassador Kohler and Lord Home that the US and Britain would be prepared to discuss disagreements on access procedures if the existing incidents could be resolved.

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11. We believe the Soviets may offer--as some Soviet diplomats have hinted privately--to negotiate new access arrangements with the Allies. Such an agreement, in Moscow's view, would not only confirm the USSR's claim to a voice in establishing access rules but would undermine the fundamental Western position that the right of unrestricted access is based on the occupation of Berlin and is not subject to negotiation. A new agreement, moreover, would provide a valuable precedent for subsequent steps toward something akin to a "free city" in West Berlin. We believe that Soviet efforts to draw the West into such arrangements will be supplemented by further moves to engage West Berlin leaders in direct talks which would also tend to change the character of the city in the direction of an independent political entity.

12. Although autobahn difficulties are the most dramatic means of applying pressures for talks on Berlin, other specific issues are available to the USSR. In talks with US and British representatives in August, for example, Khrushchev and Gro-myko referred to the need for (1) new tariffs on Western military and civic rail transport; (2) autobahn tolls for Allied troops and military supplies; (3) payment for the use of cable communications crossing East Germany; (4) rectification of the abnormal situation in the air corridors, particularly the use of air routes by airlines of countries other than the Allies. Some of these have significant political implication and might be agitated to underscore the Soviet desire for talks.

13. Even if these maneuvers to draw the West into negotiations prove to be unsuccessful, the Soviet leaders probably hope that continuing pressure on the convoy dismounting issue will oblige the Allies to avoid test cases in the future and thereby permit the USSR to claim de facto acceptance of its regulations.

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